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ABSTRACT

This document outlines proposals for a Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) in England to enhance the key role played by higher education institutions in the community. The initiative follows from the objectives of the Higher Education Reach-Out to Business and the Community Fund and proposals from the British Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions. The document proposes the awarding of 27 million British pounds to English higher education institutions subject to their submission of appropriate plans. The HEACF will run for 3 years from September 2001, and it is intended that up to 14,000 new opportunities for student volunteering will be created cumulatively during the 3 years, and that staff will be enabled to increase their involvement in the community significantly. (SLD)

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Consultation

June 01/42

Respond by 10 August 2001

Higher Education Active Community Fund: proposals

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Higher Education Active Community Fund: proposals

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions
Of interest to those responsible for	Links with business and the community
Reference	01/42
Publication date	June 2001
Enquiries to	Adrian Hill tel 0117 931 7351 e-mail a.hill@hefce.ac.uk Adrian Day tel 0117 931 7428 e-mail a.day@hefce.ac.uk

Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document outlines proposals for a Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF), to enhance the key role played by higher education institutions in the local community. The initiative follows on from the objectives of the Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community Fund (HEROBC) and proposals in the paper on 'Urban Renaissance' from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Key points

2. We propose to award £27 million to English higher education institutions subject to their submission of appropriate plans. Funding from the HEACF will run for three years from September 2001. It is intended that up to 14,000 new opportunities for student volunteering will be created cumulatively during the three years, and that staff will be enabled to significantly increase their involvement in the community.

3. The proposed activity is within the scope of HEROBC and complements the Higher Education Innovation Fund. We would welcome the views of institutions and others on the strategic aims and funding proposals for this initiative.

Action required

4. Please send any responses to this consultation to Adrian Day at the HEFCE, to arrive by 10 August 2001.

Background

5. The Government's Active Community Fund, which includes the HEACF, is part of a package of measures designed to encourage greater involvement in voluntary and community activities. Volunteering helps to promote a fairer, more cohesive society in which individuals feel they have a stake. It also helps to build bridges between communities and local organisations such as higher education institutions (HEIs). The aim is that 1 million more people will become involved in their communities, on top of the 12 million who already undertake some sort of regular voluntary work. Over the next three years, £300 million is being spent to support volunteering and make substantial progress towards this target.

6. The HEROBC remit includes higher education activities that reach out to the wider community. The HEACF initiative, in which the HEFCE is a partner alongside the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Home Office, is intended to raise the profile of this aspect of the programme. It will complement existing HEROBC projects, and promote social and cultural development where this will improve the health of the social economy. It is proposed that the HEACF will fund institution-wide co-ordination and generation of activity, and allow collaboration with established volunteering organisations.

7. Volunteering by staff and students is a strong feature in many HEIs, but there is scope for more of them to participate in voluntary and community outreach work. Increasing the involvement of HEIs with their communities will help staff and students to gain new perspectives, enable students to develop employment skills, and help to enhance the quality of life in disadvantaged sections of the community.

Strategic aims

8. We propose that the HEACF scheme will focus on developing links between HEI staff and students and the wider community, building on the institutions as significant participants in the local economy and making people more aware of the wide range of resources they offer. Volunteers (staff and students) from any academic discipline will be supported, with an emphasis on work with not-for-profit organisations and in disadvantaged areas.

9. We do not intend to prescribe the detail of potential volunteer programmes. However, the HEACF project is part of the wider Active Communities initiative which aims to involve more people in voluntary activity in their local communities. Much of this activity will be with the voluntary sector, often working in partnership with public and private sector organisations and existing volunteering programmes.

10. Funded activities should lead to recognisable benefits for the volunteer as well as for the community, including the development of generic skills (although not necessarily linked directly to course curriculum), and hence improved employability. Over the sector as a whole, the spectrum of participating volunteers should reflect the diversity within HE in England, and in particular should include older students. Institutions should ensure congruence with their widening participation strategies (see HEFCE 01/29 'Widening participation in higher education: funding decisions for 2001-02 to 2003-04'.)

Proposals and funding

11. We propose to allocate £27 million under the HEACF, using a simple formula based largely on numbers of full-time equivalent (FTE) students, with possible minor adjustments for staff. Institutions will then be required to submit concise plans describing how they propose to use the funds.

12. The HEFCE and the Home Office have each agreed to contribute £13.5 million for the initiative over three years, starting in September 2001, as an aggregate of £6.5 million for each of the first two years and £14 million in the final year.

13. It is expected that the number of volunteering opportunities developed by each HEI will bear a direct relationship to the funding allocated.

Criteria

14. We propose to ask HEIs to provide concise plans showing how the HEACF will generate new opportunities for volunteering and community

involvement, and develop links with existing national and regional volunteering organisations such as Community Service Volunteers and Student Volunteering UK. HEIs should build on the significant activities of existing voluntary sector organisations that engage with staff and students in higher education. Plans should specify the number and type of volunteer opportunities to be created during each of the three years.

15. Examples of activity which we expect to be supported through the HEACF include:

- mapping current staff and student involvement in the community, and developing ways to recognise skills acquired by the students
- appointing co-ordinators, and developing organisational infrastructure to promote the institution's position within the wider community and with partner further education colleges
- disseminating good practice, and co-ordinating institution-wide systems to increase the impact of volunteer work
- students taking part as volunteers in cultural and sporting events and environmental projects
- releasing staff to generate new contacts between the institution and the community, and related opportunities for volunteering
- students working as volunteers in schools, prisons, hospitals or local community organisations and groups
- staff and students coaching young people in sport and drama
- opening up arts, library, museum and sports facilities to the community, especially through new technology.

Allocation and monitoring process

16. In the light of responses to this consultation, we propose to issue a publication giving the funding allocations, asking HEIs to submit three year plans for using HEACF funds; and giving further guidance. Funding will begin in September 2001 and will continue for three years, subject to satisfactory provision of concise plans and targets, and delivery of agreed outcomes.

17. Monitoring would be through reports from institutions as part of their existing annual operating statements to the HEFCE. In requesting information about volunteers we will take account of HEIs' need to comply with the Data Protection Act. We also propose to invite HEIs to submit examples of successful projects in progress, to disseminate good practice to other institutions and the operating partners, and to provide initial evidence for a student volunteer award scheme.

Proposed timetable

18. We propose to work to the following timetable:

Consultation with the sector	June 2001
Deadline for consultation responses	10 August 2001
Announcement of allocations	August/September 2001
Closing date for provision of plans	October/November 2001

Issues for consultation

19. Comments are invited in particular on:

a. The proposed strategic aims of the HEACF.

b. Incentives and possible barriers to volunteering, including how to involve students already engaged in paid work.

c. Arrangements for reporting, and the dissemination of best practice between individual HEACF projects and nationally.

d. The proposed timing of the application and award process.

e. The basis for allocating funds.

f. Potential relationships with existing volunteering organisations.

g. Possible awards to selected volunteers.

Responses

20. Responses to this consultation should be sent to arrive by **10 August 2001** to:

Adrian Day
HEFCE
Northavon House
Coldharbour Lane
BRISTOL
BS16 1QD
e-mail a.day@hefce.ac.uk

Higher Education Funding Council for England
Northavon House
Coldharbour Lane
BRISTOL
BS16 1QD

tel 0117 931 7317
fax 0117 931 7203
www.hefce.ac.uk